

## Common Cold

### What is the common cold?

The common cold is an infection of the head and chest caused by a virus. It is a type of upper respiratory infection (URI). It can affect your nose, throat, sinuses, and ears. A cold can also affect the tube that connects your middle ear and throat, and your windpipe, voice box, and airways.



### How does it occur?



- Viruses are germs that cause infections. Over 200 different viruses can cause colds. The infection is spread when viruses are passed to others by sneezing, coughing, or personal contact. You may also become infected by handling objects that were touched by someone with a cold.

You are more likely to get a cold if:

- ◆ You are emotionally or physically stressed.
- ◆ You are tired.
- ◆ You are not eating enough healthy food.
- ◆ You are a smoker.
- ◆ You are living or working in crowded conditions.

### What are the symptoms?

You usually start having cold symptoms 1 to 3 days after contact with a cold virus. Symptoms may include:

scratchy or sore throat  
sneezing, runny nose, and nasal congestion  
cough  
watery eyes  
ear congestion  
slight fever (99 to 100°F, or 37.2 to 37.8°C)



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fatigue  
headache  
loss of appetite.



## How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will ask about your symptoms and examine you. There is no specific test for the common cold.

## How is it treated?



There are no medicines that cure the common cold. You can treat your symptoms with nonprescription medicines such as aspirin, acetaminophen, nose drops or sprays, cough syrups and drops, throat lozenges, and decongestants. Check with your health care provider before you take any of these drugs if you are already taking other medicines.

Do NOT give aspirin or aspirin-containing products to anyone age 21 years or younger who has a cold or flu virus because of the risk of a serious illness called Reye's syndrome.

## How long do the effects last?

Colds usually last 1 to 2 weeks. Sometimes you may get a bacterial infection after a cold.

## How can I take care of myself?

Get lots of rest.

Drink lots of fluids, such as water, fruit juice, tea, and carbonated beverages.



Use a humidifier to increase air moisture, especially in your bedroom.



Use nose drops to relieve nasal congestion. You can buy nose drops or make your own. To make a solution for nose drops, add 1 teaspoon of salt to a quart of water.

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Call your health care provider if you have any of the following symptoms:

- ♦ worsening earache
- ♦ trouble breathing
- ♦ swollen, tender glands in your neck
- ♦ chest pain
- ♦ skin rash
- ♦ worsening sore throat
- ♦ white or yellow spots on your tonsils or throat
- ♦ a cough that gets worse or becomes painful
- ♦ temperature of 102°F (38.9°C) or higher that lasts more than 2 days
- ♦ shaking chills
- ♦ headache that lasts several days
- ♦ unusual tiredness
- ♦ mental confusion
- ♦ blue or gray lips, skin, or nails.



## What can be done to help prevent the spread of colds?

The following suggestions may help **prevent the spread** of your cold to others.

Turn away from others and use tissues when you cough or sneeze.

Wash your hands after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.



Wash your hands before touching food, dishes, glasses, silverware, or napkins.

Use paper cups and paper towels in bathrooms.

Don't let your nose or mouth touch public telephones or drinking fountains.



Don't share food or eating utensils with others.

Avoid close contact with others for the first 2 to 4 days.

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To **lower your risk** of catching a cold:

Avoid close contact with people who have a cold.

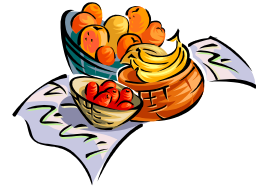


Keep your hands away from your nose and mouth.



Wash your hands often, especially after coming in contact with someone who has a cold.

Eat healthy foods, especially fruits with vitamin C, such as oranges.



Get plenty of rest.



Do not smoke.

Developed by McKesson Clinical Reference Systems.

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